

## Reports of their deaths are greatly exaggerated

FIDEL CASTRO, Mikhail Gorbachev and Pope Benedict XVI – Italian Tommaso Debenedetti has killed them all in fake tweets aimed at exposing shoddy journalism that have earned him global notoriety.

The latest victim of Mr Debenedetti's unusual hobby is the British author J.K. Rowling, whose death in an accident he announced from a fake Twitter account purporting to belong to her fellow writer, John le Carré.

"Death works well on Twitter," Mr Debenedetti – who is in his 40s and says he teaches literature at a school in Rome – said in a phone interview.

He said when he saw his le Carré account had 2500 followers, including journalists from British, German and US media, "I decided to make John le Carré say J.K. Rowling had died".

Mr Debenedetti said the tweet was then retweeted hundreds of times and a Chilean television station even gave the false news as fact.

The literary fake artist says his aim in all of this is to "show that Twitter has become a news agency – the least reliable in the world".

"Unfortunately, journalism works on speed. False news spreads exponentially," he said, pointing out that retweets by journalists lend credibility to rumours even if they are not actually published. "In the end, everyone forgets what the original source was."

Among his many claims to internet infamy, Mr Debenedetti boasted of having forced the Vatican spokesman, Federico Lombardi, to deny the Pope had died after sending a false tweet purportedly from the Vatican's Secretary of State, Tarcisio Bertone.

He claimed his tweet announcing the death of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad made the price of oil go up and that another one about the demise of Mr Gorbachev prompted someone to update his Wikipedia page with the day of his death.

AFP